

**CONFIDENTIAL**

21 June 1962

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Implications of a US Approach to the USSR  
Concerning the Chinese Communist Military Buildup

CONCLUSION

The Soviets are likely in any case to do what they can to restrain the Chinese from an attack in the Straits. It is possible, however, that a US approach would persuade them that the dangers were greater than they had thought, and would thus lend greater urgency to their restraining efforts.

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1. It can probably be assumed that the Soviets are aware of the Chinese moves, although it is possible that they do not have as full a picture as we. In any case, it would probably be necessary to convey in some detail the true scope of the Chinese military movements in order to make our expression of concern persuasive. (Presumably a security problem would arise, but that is not discussed here.) Otherwise the Soviets, who have always rebuffed any attempt to discuss the Chinese problem frankly, might consider the approach a fishing expedition, or worse, an attempt to compromise their relations with China.

2. If the Soviets, whether because of their own information or because of what we conveyed to them, took as seriously as we do the possibility that the Chinese might be planning offensive action, there can be no doubt that they would be seriously concerned. They would probably estimate that the risks of a military involvement between the US and Communist China and a subsequent escalation would be high. In the matter of the offshore islands, their relation to the Chinese Communists is somewhat like ours to the GRC. They have an alliance and a moral commitment to give military aid in certain loosely-defined circumstances. They have no desire to be put in the position, because of these islands, of having to choose between assuming potentially serious military risks and seeming to renege on their commitments. They would dislike being put in this position all the more if, as we think likely, the Chinese have not

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consulted them. Basically, therefore, their interest would be much the same as ours, that is, to dissuade the Chinese Communists from precipitating a highly dangerous situation.

3. Even in the very unlikely event that the Soviets believed that Peiping could attack the offshore islands without becoming involved with the US, and could overwhelm the Chinese defenders, they would probably be opposed to the action. A success of this magnitude would enormously enhance Peiping's prestige in the Bloc and Communist movement at a time when the Soviets are involved in a severe struggle to maintain their ascendancy against a Chinese challenge. The Chinese would have scored a telling point on one of the main issues of controversy by demonstrating that it was possible to take successful aggressive action without excessive risk. Invidious comparisons would be made to Soviet tactics on Berlin, already under criticism in some Communist quarters.

4. The fact that the Soviets might share our interest in forestalling a Chinese attack on the islands would not mean necessarily that they would acknowledge this and agree to join us in attempting preventive action to forestall Chinese Communist action. They probably would not. It is a rigid rule with them not to discuss internal Communist affairs with "the enemy," and

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in any case they would probably not be willing to admit that their relations with China are as bad as we know them to be. Most probably they would point to GRC provocations and threats and declare that Peiping's measures were defensive. These could be an implied demand here that we restrain our Chinese if we expected them to restrain theirs. They would probably reiterate their support of Peiping's claims to the islands and convey that they would aid China if she were attacked.

5. Even if the Soviets rejected collaboration with us by taking some such line, they would probably, assuming they were convinced that there was a real danger, do what they could to dissuade the Chinese Communists from attacking. They might tell Peiping, or at least hint, that they would not consider the alliance applicable in case of an attack on the islands. Their most effective reaction would probably be to cut off POL supplies, and we think it is possible that they would be prepared to do this or threaten to do it. This latter measure might stand a good chance of restraining the Chinese, even though they would be impervious to Soviet arguments from policy or risk.

6. On the whole, an approach to the Soviets would offer some possibility but no great assurance of affecting Chinese decisions. On the other hand, there do not appear to be any serious disadvantages or risks in making the attempt. Care

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would of course have to be taken to avoid giving the Soviets the impression either that we were threatening China or that we were concerned to avoid military action at all costs. One advantage of an approach to the Soviets now would be in establishing a line of communication with them on this subject against the time when it might be needed.

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